DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 563 PS 011 936

TITLE Single Parent Families, Parts 1-4. Options in Education Program Nos. 272-275.
INSTITUTION George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Inst. for Educational Leadership.: National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 59p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Divorce: Family Counseling: *Family Life: *Family Problems: *One Parent Family: *Parent Child Relationship: Social Attitudes: *Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

Four National Public Radio interviews with single parents, their children and concerned others are recounted in these transcriptions. The interviews cover a wide range of topics, including problems faced by single parents (for example, routine difficulties of managing daily chores and emotional difficulties): single parents' perceptions of the attitudes and reactions of society and friends towards them: single parents' experiences of discriminatory acts by institutions and professionals: and methods used by single parents to resolve family problems. Additionally, the reactions of a young girl to her parents' divorce, aspects of the relationship between a father and his daughter, cooperation among black single mothers, and resources providing support to single parents and their children are described. In conclusion, stereotypes of single parents are discussed and a study of school attendance that was thought to have contributed to the stereotyping of single parents is criticized and defended. (Author/RH)

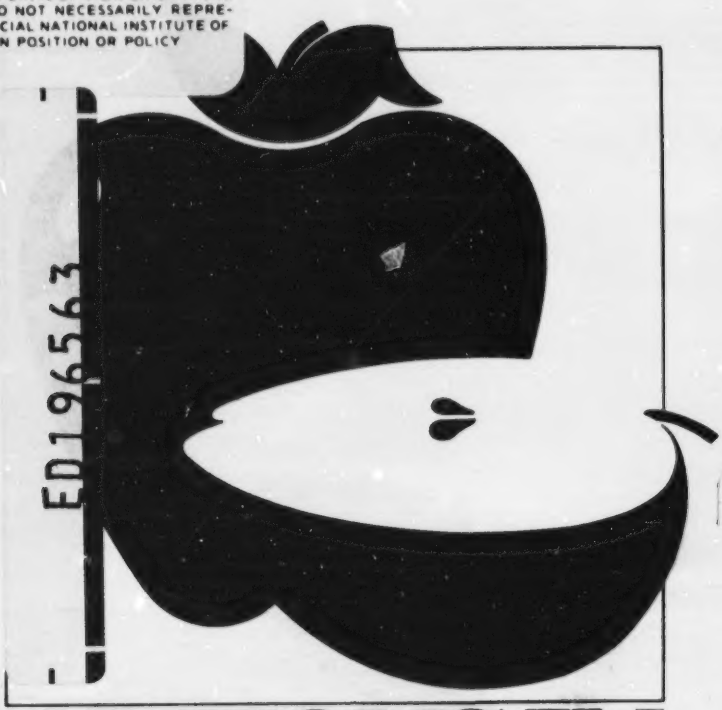
****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED196563

PS011936



OPTIONS IN EDUCATION

takes listeners to the core of the issues

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, PARTS 1-4, PROGRAM NOS. 272-275

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
National Public Radio
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A co-production of
National Public Radio
and the Institute for
Educational Leadership of the
George Washington University

Program No. 272: Single Parent Families, Part 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
WHAT ONE SINGLE MOTHER THOUGHT HER HOME LIFE WOULD BE LIKE	1
SIX YEAR OLD HOLLY LEITH, IN BOSTON	1-2
HER MOTHER DESCRIBES THE PROBLEMS UNIQUE TO A SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLD	2-4
GEORGE MC CULLY	4-5
SOCIOLOGIST ROBERT WEISS	5-6
SINGLE FATHER JIM MAY HEADS HIS HOUSEHOLD IN TOLEDO	6-8
ROBERT WEISS DESCRIBES HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE IN THESE FAMILIES	9-10
17 YEAR OLD JENNIFER SLOAN	10
YOUNGER SISTER HEATHER SLOAN	10-11
THEIR MOTHER, KATE SLOAN	11-12

FEB 2 1981

WHAT ONE SINGLE MOTHER THOUGHT HER HOME LIFE WOULD BE LIKE

MOTHER: I imagined myself, you know, being happily married, with maybe two or three children and maybe having some personal interests on the side, but my life would be devoted to my husband and my family. That's how I imagined it. That's what I was raised to understand was my goal in life, and that's what I pursued. It's totally different.

MERROW: She's divorced, with two children, and on her own.

REINHARDT: Many people have shared that fantasy, only to find they now share a different reality.

MERROW: Today, nearly 20 percent of all households with children have only one parent living in them. That's six million families. 80 percent more than there were 10 years ago.

REINHARDT: Meanwhile, the number of two parent households continues to shrink. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, for NPR's Options in Education. Single parent households, traditionally outside of the mainstream, today a major part of American family life.

REINHARDT: Can these families provide the nurturance their children need?

MERROW: In this, the first of a four part series, we'll talk with people who watch family trends, with single parents, and with their children.

SIX YEAR OLD HOLLY LEITH, IN BOSTON

ADLER: Do you think that you get enough attention from your Mom?

HOLLY: Sometimes.

ADLER: When don't you get enough attention from her?

HOLLY: When Chad's always talking, and then Chad --

MERROW: Holly is six. She lives in Boston with her ten year old brother Chad and their mother, Phyllis Leith.

HOLLY: -- conversation with my mother, and I never get to, sometimes, I don't get her attention.

ADLER: How do you feel when you don't get enough attention from her?

HOLLY: Mad.

ADLER: Do you tell her that you're mad?

HOLLY: I punch Chad in the stomach.

ADLER: So that's how you let them know you want some attention, huh?

Try to imagine when you are a grownup and you decide to have children. Do you think that it would be important to you that your children lived with both their parents, or do you think it doesn't really matter that much?

HOLLY: I think it would be important, because I think if I had children they would like my -- their father a lot, and I don't think if they were like five years old and six, I don't think because they would know him very much, not like they split up when I was like two years old, they would know him a lot and they wouldn't want to split up with him.

ADLER: If you knew somebody who was a kid whose parents were splitting up and they were going to live with only one of their parents, and they were really worried and scared, what would you tell them? What advice would you give them?

HOLLY: I would give them the advice to not be scared and to just wait and they would be all right.

HER MOTHER DESCRIBES THE PROBLEMS UNIQUE TO SINGLE PARENTING

LEITH: Every day time has to be set aside for the school work, for their piano lessons, driving them to swim class, taking Holly to ballet, and I feel very stressed by that, just because it's -- I have to rush home from school, pick them up, take them here, take them there, get through supper, sit down and make sure that there's time for their homework, make sure that I've given them that attention. It's a consciousness. You have to work at it and work at it and make sure that you're not leaving -- leaving something out. And then it's always am I giving one more time than the other, because as soon as I feel that I'm spending too much time on one child's homework, the other one begins to pull at me and say -- just try to distract, you know, "Mummy, look at this," or, "There's something that I need," or, "I don't feel well," you know, is another one. "I'm not feeling well. I have a headache." Or, "I think I have a fever." Just to distract the attention from the other.

So it's you always have to be conscious of their needs, and it's very -- I think it's very stressful.

ADLER: Does being a single parent have a direct effect on

how you bring your children up? Are there any kinds of ways in which you have to compensate for being a single parent or alter your child rearing?

LEITH: Yes, I'm always trying to think of am I giving them enough, should I be providing, especially for Chad, some kind of male model, in terms of sports events. Should someore be taking him to sports events. Should I be doing that. Should I see that he goes to the Y and make sure about his physical self. Because I think my relationship with Holly is not so very different than it would be, mother-daughter, but that with the absence of a father for a son, there's -- especially now that Chad's getting older and he's just turned 10 and he's starting to worry about sexual things. He's starting to worry about when he's going to get pubic hair and what's he going to do with sexual things. So you become conscious of am I, you know, as a mother and as a woman, how can I understand these male things enough to teach him, you know. Is his father telling him these things? I'm not sure about it. He doesn't talk to me about what he tells his father. So I'm really aware of, especially that, how do I bring him into adolescence smoothly, so that he understands these things.

ADLER: From your own perspective, what effects do you think raising your children alone has had on your children?

LEITH: I think that they miss their father. I think that they want to have time with him and arranging that is difficult. Right now they're seeing him only once every other weekend, and I feel that when things are not going smoothly, when we're particularly hassled or stressed by something going on, that they will say, "I want to see my father," and that's very painful to hear.

ADLER: Do you think that there are any advantages to the situation? Will your children gain anything because they have been brought up with only one parent?

LEITH: The thing that comes to mind first is that I think the time that I spend with them is very quality time, that I'm so conscious about the fact that I have to be both father and mother than when I'm with them, when I set that time aside, it's a very good time. We both feel it.

The children are incredibly independent. They -- if they had to, they could make their own breakfast, including frying eggs, making the toast, making the hot chocolate, whatever is necessary. They dress themselves. They can take care of their own room. They can get themselves downtown to Boston and back. They've had to do that. They've had to. They've not been very coddled, and they've had to fend for themselves in many ways that

maybe other children wouldn't have to.

MERROW: Phyllis Leith is one of the 70 percent of single parents who became single because of divorce. She's been running her household alone for four years.

REINHARDT: George McCully, also divorced, and the father of two boys says the first year is the hardest.

GEORGE MC CULLY

MC CULLY: There are two common reactions to separation and divorce, among the principals. One is depression and the other is euphoria, and by far most people experience depression and those who experience euphoria only experience it temporarily and then they're depressed like everybody else.

Our euphoria was, I think, caused by just the sudden achievement of order at home. We spent a lot of time. I, you know, went back to a lot of things that my mother had done for me as a child that I had found so cloying. The pies and the cookies and the doughnuts and all this kind of stuff, and we did all of that, because I was trying to convey to the children that we had a home and a real family life and stuff like that, and I was really enjoying it myself. So we did all of those kinds of things, and I did enjoy the -- the release from having always to second guess, to wonder what the hell was going to happen next, to look over my shoulder to see what catastrophe was about to occur, or to wonder, you know, every time I made a decision what unfortunate side effect it would have. I just didn't have to think about that and I was the deciding voice and I would be responsible for my decisions and it was just a simpler decision making process, and I suppose I certainly did enjoy that. It was much less stressful for me.

REINHARDT: When did the depression hit?

MC CULLY: Increasingly, as the first year went on, and I think the -- all of the loads that have been described as characteristic of single parenthood, the work load and the emotional load and the responsibility load, you know, just piled up and piled up, and there would be the ordinary run of problems, which, when faced by an adult living alone with kids and working full time, become real crises, and so they have to be dealt with in extremely stressful circumstances, and that kind of thing just built up. In fact, at the end of the first year I had mono and for a month I was just completely knocked out.

REINHARDT: Can you remember what kinds of problems you're talking about?

MC CULLY: Problems with baby sitters that I didn't -- that weren't performing up to my expectations. Problems of what to do when a child was sick, what should I do when I had to go to the office, you know, how I would manage that. All the kinds of normal problems that single parents have. What happens when th car breaks down. There's no letup. Every single problem has to be dealt with only by the one person whose life is already full of obligations of one kind or another.

SOCIOLOGIST ROBERT WEISS

WEISS: You know, single parents don't start out wanting to change the structure of their families. When somebody becomes a single parent, no matter how it happens they have in mind that they're going to be a very, very good parent, but a very good parent in the same way that a parent is a very good parent in a two parent household, except that thre isn't that second parent.

REINHARDT: Sociologist Robert Weiss of the University of Massachusetts.

WEISS: Many single parents then discover they can't really do it the way that they had been doing it before, and they get the kids together around the kitchen table and they have what I've called the Single Parent's Inaugural Address, because it does inaugurate the change in structure. They say something like, "Kids, the way it used to be I was Mom," because mostly it's women. You know, 90 percent of single parents are women. "The way it used to be, I was mom and you were the kids and if you needed something you'd just say, 'Hey, Mom, would you get this for me,' or do this for me, and I would, because that's the way moms are supposed to be. But we can't operate that way anymore, because now I'm working and I'm bringing home the money that we use to run the family, and that's my job and I can't do very much more than that. So, to run the family now you're going to have to pick up a lot more than you'd been doing before, and we're going to have to define this family as we're a family of all equals. You're equals with me and I'm equals with you and we've all got our responsibilities and we've all got our jobs, and we've all got to do them, because there's just no other way this family is going to be able to operate."

That's the Single Parent's Inaugural Address. When I talk with single parents, which I do fairly often, I ask how many of those here who are working full time have said something like that to their kids. First of all, you know, people usually giggle when I describe this, because they -- they hear themselves coming back to themselves, and -- but then I ask them --

TISCHLER: So it's a redefinition of the rules of the family, almost.

WEISS: Exactly. It's a redefinition of the assumptions on which the family operates, yeah.

TISCHLER: Are we also encountering a role reversal?

WEISS: Role reversal can take place in one parent households. It takes place in two parent households sometimes, too. When parents are absolutely unable to manage, absolutely unable to function, and the kids then not only carry out their own jobs, not only keep themselves going and look after themselves as kids normally do in one parent households, to a much greater extent than in two parent households, but start looking after the parent a bit, become supportive and nurturant to the parent.

I could read you an excerpt from here that's a very touching instance of a role reversal, with a child parenting the parent. My sense of it is that if that happens only for, you know, only briefly, it's not really that bad for the kids. But let me read you an instance of role reversal and then I'll tell you how old the child is. I won't tell you before reading the instance. This was reported to us by a man whose wife had been killed in an auto accident. He had two children, the older a boy, and he's now referring to the boy.

"A lot of times in the beginning my son was like a father and I was like a son. One night we were sitting in the house watching television. I'd kept him up late because I didn't want to be alone, and he said to me, 'Daddy, let's play a game,' and I said okay and he said, 'You be the Mommy and I'll be the God.' I said okay. And then he said, 'Okay, you knock on my door.' So I knocked on the door. He opens up the door and says, 'Who's this at my door?' And he's got the deep voice and everything. And I said, 'It's Mommy.' And he brightened all up and he says, 'Mommy, come in,' and he pulled me in by the hand and he says, 'I've been waiting for you.' And I said, 'What's there for me to do here?' And he said, 'Oh, we have baseball games, barbecues, picnics, birthday parties, everything, and we're going to have a birthday party for you.' So we had this imaginary cake and we had to blow out the candles, and then at the end of it he just looked at me and he put his arms around me and he told me he loved me."

It's an instance where a child recognized his father's extreme need for nurturance and caring and supplied it in just the way that in another instance a parent might recognize a child's need. The child was just four.

REINHARDT: Sociologist Robert Weiss.

MERROW: Sometimes the child must be both child and adult.

Sometimes the parent must be both mother and father.

SINGLE FATHER JIM MAY HEADS HIS HOUSEHOLD IN TOLEDO

MAY: My performance in this role has not been that good. I've -- but I'm not going to worry about it. But I found a lot of things that I should have done.

CHILD: I have to wear this for school.

MAY: Oh. She ought to be a model. She changes her clothes about four times a day. Excuse me. What?

CHILD: I'm going to go play baseball, okay?

MAY: You're going to go play baseball? Okay. Very nice, Sharon. Really nice.

CHILD: Daddy, I've got a skirt you could iron, a pink one.

MAY: Okay. Before you wear it we'll iron it, okay?

CHILD: I want you to iron it so I can wear that one or the pink one, okay?

MAY: I don't -- I was going to say I don't try to be a mother and a father, but that's not true. I suppose I do try to just meet all their needs. I don't segment, you know, the interaction between me and the kids or between the kids and I, as being, well, this is predominantly a male input, this predominantly would be a female role. I mean it's just all become pretty natural to me. I --

CHILD: Will you iron the skirt right now?

MAY: No.

CHILD: Why?

MAY: Because we've got company here. I'm not going to go downstairs and iron.

CHILD: We can bring the --

MAY: No, we're not going to iron a skirt.

CHILD: Upstairs?

MAY: No.

CHILD: Why not?

MAY: I just told you why. I'm not going to iron a skirt, Sharon.

CHILD: I'll iron it.

MAY: No.

CHILD: Couldn't we iron it?

MAY: Appealing to a lower court. I can see a lot of parents -- and maybe this is being presumptuous on my part -- tending to want their children to be entertained by television or something so that they can get all of the, you know, household chores done. I find it a lot more productive in the long run -- not as expedient, but to turn off the TV and have everybody work with me on the household chores. Because I'm not going to, you know, become a servant around here. That's right, I'm going to work by myself.

So, anyhow, it wasn't only a revelation of how much I was going to have to give, but it was also a revelation of what I'd have to take. You know, I've got to map out -- there is nothing more important at 6:00 o'clock in the morning in this house than the fact that I have to be at work in an hour and a half, or two hours. That is, you know, that's priority one, and then everything else follows from there.

If they were supposed to have brought home a note and, you know, signed up for a skating party or something -- this is something that happened -- then they've lost out, because they should have done that the night before, and at 7:00 o'clock in the morning getting Dad to work is the first priority.

So you have to take -- you have to demand what you need. I just tore all this flooring up. When I moved in here this house was decorated like French provincial, and I see it as a modern style house, you know. I like the geometry to it.

Look at this. We went to Emergency last month with that.

CHILD: Jimmy hit me, he hit me on my lip.

MAY: Yeah. Well, he was playing. When you play rough you get hit in the mouth. That's -- you know.

I wanted to have hardwood floors in my house and people told me that it would be more convenient to have carpeted

floors in the house as far as the children were concerned. Well, after a lot of, you know, pondering that thing and weighing that, I finally came to the conclusion that this was going to be -- an affirmative thing was going to happen in my favor because this was a chance for me to assert myself, my presence, on the house.

So now I've got the hardwood floors. I haven't finished them yet, but now they understand that that's something that I get, you know. And so it gives them a chance to reciprocate for all the concessions I make to them.

I give them the basement. They give me my hardwood floors, you know.

REINHARDT: Jim May lives in Toledo with his four children, ages 8, 6, 4 and 3.

MERROW: In single parent households the children are more likely to be heavily involved in family decisions. Sociologist Robert Weiss.

ROBERT WEISS DESCRIBES HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE IN THESE FAMILIES

WEISS: Trivial decisions or big decisions, it doesn't matter. A fairly mid-level decision, like where are we going to go on vacation. In a two parent family the parents will say where do you want to go, well why don't we go out to the beach again. Okay, I thought that was fine. The kids didn't really like it very much. Oh, look, we'll figure out something for them. Hey, kids, how would you like to go out to the beach. Ah, we don't want to go. Look, we'll make it right for you. We think this is were we ought to go, okay?

That's a two parent family The decision is made between the parents and the kids are informed, and there may be some sort of democratic facade about we'll consult the kids, but it really doesn't happen all that much.

In a one parent family the kids are truly consulted, because it can't possibly work if the kids are against it. So in a one parent family that same decision would be made sort of this way.

The mother would say I'd like to go out to the beach; how do you kids feel about it? Oh, we don't really like it. You don't? But you liked it last year. Oh, mom, we really don't like it. You know what we'd like to do? We'd like to do -- we'd like to go travelling. Well, I don't like that. Well, what if we only went to another city one time? Oh, I guess, okay. What about if we go to the beach for one week and we go travelling

for a week? Okay. The kids have really gotten involved in developing the solution. So people walking into a single parent household very often feel like it's just terribly permissive, and the kids really run things or almost run things, in a way that's thoroughly undesirable. This woman has no control over her kids.

It's really not true, because if you look at what the kids are doing in the household, you find that they have many more responsibilities than kids in two parent households their ages, that they're starting supper, that they're doing errands, that they're responsible, maybe the older ones for taking care of the younger kids, in ways that aren't true in other households.

It's not that it's an overindulgent mother. It's, rather, a mother who's treating her kids as almost fellow adults.

MERROW: Sociologist Robert Weiss of the University of Massachusetts.

17 YEAR OLD JENNIFER SLOAN

JENNIFER: Well, Mom and I are really close and we like living in the same house. I only have a year left of doing that, and I think it's really sad if she leaves the last year and just kind of goes off to another job, and then I have to go to college and then we just won't be together anymore. It's really sad. It's like she's saying, "Well, I've taken care of you for 17 years. Now I quit. Go on and do it on your own." And it's a year too early. I don't want her to do that yet.

MERROW: Jennifer Sloan is 17 and a senior in high school in Eugene, Oregon. Her mother Kate has been offered a job 1,000 miles away in Alaska.

REINHARDT: At times, every family has to decide when to move, whether to change jobs, and what the children will do. But in a single parent household, stressful decisions can be even more complicated.

MERROW: Kate Sloan has another daughter, Heather, aged 15-1/2.

YOUNGER SISTER HEATHER SLOAN

HEATHER: I don't want to live here alone, but I -- you know, this is one of the things I'm selfish about. I feel like I just won't go up to Alaska, and I won't go to Arkansas to my Dad, because I just -- right now I don't feel like I'm ready for that radical of a change. I don't feel like I'm stable enough yet. Because there's a lot of things going really fast in my life right

now, and it's going to take me awhile to get used to them. This job takes up a lot of my time. School. I always have to be on top of it. I always have to be thinking about it. And just changing to a different school, it would stop my job responsibilities, but I like my job a lot, and a new school is just something nobody ever wants to go through.

DANE: When you said it scares you, you know, you still have -- you're close to your Mom. You said you were real close to her. Do you resent her at all for thinking about going up there? Because most people's reaction would be she's a mother, what's she doing. But you're growing up. You know, you're pretty responsible for yourself. What do you think about that, about how her role as a mother and you as the kid, that she's going to go up there?

HEATHER: I do resent her for thinking about it, because I feel like I should be, you know, one of her main priorities, my sister and I should be, but I also know that my Mom is the kind of person who just has to have the arts and the forest, she has to have those things, and Eugene is getting too big for her.

DANE: And what do you think your father would do if she did take it?

HEATHER: I have a strong feeling he would take her to court and get us there as quick as he could. As soon as she left he would do something about it.

DANE: How do you feel about that?

HEATHER: Well, that's one of the reasons I want Mom to stay, so we could avoid that whole thing, because I know that it would be terrible. I mean it would be pretty much hell for quite a long time, I'm sure. And just the thing between the parents is like a tornado, you know. It's just spinning between them both, and it's just such a -- it's such a -- you know, it's so terrible. It's something that nobody wants to go through, that everybody knows that's just something that people end up being scarred when they come out of it.

THEIR MOTHER, KATE SLOAN

SLOAN: The biggest consideration I have right now is probably whether the kids could deal with this. Unless -- and this would be the ideal thing -- to have someone live here that I knew and trusted that they could get along with, to live in my house and maintain it and keep an eye on them. They're both pretty responsible kids. They've had to be. And they can do things on their own. But there needs to be somebody here who can

sort of keep an eye on them and have some control over some things. And possibly that's a way out.

But as far as what their father would say concerning that, I just -- I have a feeling that he might get angry enough about me deserting my children that he might want to take me to court and sue for custody. But at this late date -- I mean Jennifer will be 18 next birthday, and you know, it's kind of late to do that. So I don't know what's going to happen there, but it's a big decision and the kids are definitely going to play a big part in it.

DANE: But some people are going to think, "She's going to leave her 15-1/2 year old daughter and go to Alaska? Who does she think -- you know, she's a mother." What do you say to people like that?

SLOAN: I say, "Get with it folks. This stuff happens all the time. People are leaving their kids and having to, and just having to deal with these problems. It's not as though I decided I was going to leave my kids, you know. I mean I never dreamed I was going to go to Alaska, and I may still not. But I feel that if that's the right opportunity for me now, that then I have -- I'm a damned fool if I don't take it.

MERROW: In the next part of this series on single parents, a problem we cause.

REINHARDT: A dangerous cycle which starts with our attitudes towards a so-called broken home.

MERROW: The reporters who contributed to this program are Iris Adler and Henry Tischler of WBUR in Boston; Barbara Glowacki, WGTG, Toledo, Ohio; and, Debby Dane, KLCC, Eugene, Oregon. Our engineers are Flawn Williams, Terry Knight and Greg Hedgepath.

REINHARDT: Our staff includes Producer John Merrow, Associate Producer Mary Rouse, Assistant Producer Rebecca Goldfield, Administrative Assistant Marcia Witten, and me, Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: If you'd like a transcript or a cassette of this series, write us. Our address is National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

REINHARDT: $4.00 for the complete printed transcript or $12.00 for the cassettes.

MERROW: Ask for Single Parent Households. $4.00 for the printed transcript of all four programs. $12.00 for the cassettes.

REINHARDT: Our address again, National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: Options in Education is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University.

REINHARDT: Support is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

MERROW: This is NPR, National Public Radio.

Program No. 273: Single Parent Families, Part Two

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
GINGER ZYSKOWSKI GETTING HER BOYS OFF TO SCHOOL	1
GINGER SAYS THAT GUILT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST PRESSURES ON HER	1-2
SHE SAYS THAT SOCIETY JUDGES THE SINGLE PARENT HARSHLY	2
FAMILY THERAPIST MARIANNE WALTERS	2-3
GINGER'S SON HELPS WITH THE COOKING	3
BABYSITTER	4-5
GINGER DESCRIBES HER FRIENDS' REACTIONS TO HER DIVORCE	5-6
SHE ENCOUNTERED DISCRIMINATION IN BANKING AND HOUSING	6-8
JIM MAY ENCOUNTERED A MORE SUBTLE FORM OF DISCRIMINATION	8
PHYLLIS CLAY SAYS WE SHUN PEOPLE WHO ARE ALONE	9-10
GINGER SAYS SHE FEELS VERY CLOSE WITH HER CHILDREN	10
DR. URI BRONFENBRENNER	10-11

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, PART TWO

GINGER ZYSKOWSKI GETTING HER BOYS OFF TO SCHOOL

GINGER: Mike, get your socks up to the laundry.

CHILD: I don't need a jacket.

GINGER: It's cold out there this morning.

CHILD: Is it going to stay cold?

GINGER: Yeah. It's not going to get hot today. Did you brush your hair in the back?

CHILD: Does it look like it?

GINGER: Not really.

CHILD: Then I didn't.

GINGER: Do you think maybe you should?

MERROW: Ginger Zyskowski is getting her three boys ready for school before she goes off to work.

REINHARDT: Sounds as if she's doing a pretty responsible job, but you might not think that if you believe what you read, or what a lot of people say.

MERROW: You see, Ginger Zyskowski is divorced. For a lot of us that act conjures up images of a broken home.

REINHARDT: A fatherless family. Kids running wild. An unhealthy, unwholesome situation. Not a real family. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, for NPR's Options in Education.

GINGER SAYS THAT GUILT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST PRESSURES ON HER

GINGER: I think the worst thing any single parent has to deal with is guilt. I mean people in general have a lot of guilt to carry around. Single parents deal with it almost constantly. I mean you feel guilty because you can't be with them if you have to work. You feel guilty if you can't be home when they get home from school. You feel guilty if you can't be at all the school functions because you're at work. And sometimes you even wonder if you did the right thing.

MERROW: Nearly 20 percent of all households with children have only one parent living in them.

REINHARDT: That number's growing while the number of two parent households with children is shrinking.

MERROW: But social attitudes are not changing as fast as the numbers, and those unchanging attitudes affect what single parents believe about themselves. Ginger Zyskowski.

GINGER SAYS THAT SOCIETY JUDGES THE SINGLE PARENT HARSHLY

GINGER: Society has pressures that make you feel like you've got to be a better parent than a regular two parent family, and you get scrutinized and you get discriminated against. I don't like the usage of the word broken home. It isn't a broken home. The marriage has failed. And any time you use the word broken that means that something has just -- you know, to a child, when the child hears this and he says oh, I come from a broken home, that can do something to his image, to his self-image, even though a majority of the kids, in his classroom perhaps, are from divorced families.

FAMILY THERAPIST MARIANNE WALTERS

WALTERS: I see particular problems when women are trying to raise little boys.

MERROW: Family therapist Marianne Walters.

WALTERS: If you raise this child yourself you'll make a sissy, and you know, sissy in quotes, out of him. He needs a male image. And what is she to feel but incompetent to raise this male child.

REINHARDT: How does she do it?

WALTERS: Well, she does it by being a parent, that's all, by being this kid's mother and not trying to be this kid's father, by knowing that he may lack something, you know, in not having a father around. That's all right.

See, I don't think kids were put on this earth to have everything all the time. You know, maybe they were put on this earth just to pleasure us, in fact, as parents. But you know, I don't think -- I think that to feel guilty -- I think we help people to feel guilty, for one thing. We help them. Our attitude is the same as mental health professionals, or in the -- or in what is written, or in the studies like -- studies that say children will be depressed, a large majority of children are

depressed if their families are -- if their parents are separated, or they'll fail in school. So if a kid can't study one night and starts to cry, and a parent's read that article, she knows what the reason is.

Now, if there are two parents at home and the kid can't study that night, can't concentrate and starts to cry, they think, dammit, this kid's got to get his act together. You see?

But if that happens and the kid -- and there's only one parent at home, you know, mother, who is usually the one parent, but it could be father, begins to think if there was a wife, if there was a father, this kid wouldn't be crying, you know, and it's my fault. If I'd chosen right. If I hadn't fought. If I'd been better. This wouldn't have happened. And there it is. There's the beginning of the cycle.

REINHARDT: It's a cycle. You're saying we actually exacerbate the problem.

WALTERS: Absolutely. The attitudes exacerbate the problems.

REINHARDT: In the case of a child not studying well and the mother, say, assuming it's because he's not got a father, what then might happen in this little scenario?

WALTERS: What happens is that it's hard for her, then, to be her normal self. You know, she's feeling that she needs to make up for what this kid doesn't have. So instead of saying, "Dry your tears and read the book, Johnny," you know, or, "You're going to have to finish this now," or, "Honey, I know you're feeling frustrated by what's happening, you know, by how hard it is to get this material, but I want you to do it and I expect you can," this mother's going to feel, "Oh, my God, what have I done? Oh, poor kid. Oh, he can't do it." And the metamessage, that is the underground, the under-message to the child, is lack of expectation. What's happening now is not only that she feels incompetent to help him do his work, but he's feeling that she can't expect of him because he's a deprived, poor kid, and so suddenly you've got a mother who feels deskilled as a parent and a kid who feels that he's not whole, that his mama can't say, "Cut it out and do your work," you know, that something's wrong with him because he doesn't have a daddy.

You see, it works both ways. The more we expect of our children the more they feel like they're someone. The way we've -- the way we value people is to expect from them.

GINGER'S SON HELPS WITH THE COOKING

GINGER: Do you want to make a fruit salad for dinner?

CHILD: At first I'm going to put in this.

DORVAL: That's the pineapple, right?

CHILD: Yeah.

DORVAL: What else are you going to put in?

CHILD: Banana and apple. Hey, what about oranges?

GINGER: Yep.

CHILD: Where are they?

GINGER: In the refrigerator.

CHILD: Where?

GINGER: I had to say a few things to my parents because they said some things to him, "Well, now, you're the man in the house, and you've got to take care of everybody." No, he's not. He's six years old or he's seven years old. He's not the man of the house. There is no man of the house. And to lay that kind of responsibility on a child is bad.

Plus, all three of them had feelings that every child goes through divorce has. Is it my fault. And even though the younger two didn't particularly verbalize that, I made sure that very often I said things to them that made them understand that it was not their fault that this happened.

BABYSITTER

BABYSITTER: How are you?

CHILD: Fine.

BABYSITTER: Are you cooking?

CHILD: Yes.

GINGER: He's our salad maker. He's real good at making fruit salad now.

BABYSITTER: Good.

GINGER: So I've figured out that they can have the spaghetti and fruit salad for dinner.

BABYSITTER: Sounds great. Don't worry about it. I can --

GINGER: That's ready and that's ready.

BABYSITTER: We can worry about that later.

GINGER: There's ice cream in the refrigerator for treats, and bedtime is 9:00 o'clock, no messing around.

BABYSITTER: No messing around, okay.

GINGER: 9:00 o'clock. And there's no homework so you don't have to worry about that. Make sure they brush their teeth before they go to bed and otherwise they --

BABYSITTER: Do they have pajamas to wear?

GINGER: Yes.

BABYSITTER: Do they know where they are?

GINGER: Yes, they know where they are and they know everything about getting in bed.

CHILD: And we know how to get dressed.

BABYSITTER: Well, I hope you do. If you don't you'll go naked. Okay, we'll take care of everything here.

GINGER: Okay, they're all set. Make sure they rinse their dishes and put them in the dishwasher when they're done.

GINGER DESCRIBES HER FRIENDS' REACTIONS TO HER DIVORCE

GINGER: When I was first divorced, and I know I'm not alone, the friends that I had had, or that we had had in the marriage, were forced, I guess they forced themselves to take sides. So -- which I can understand. I mean I can accept that. Some of the people were my husband's friends and some were my friends, and then when we separated, well, some felt that he was right and some felt that I was right.

The biggest thing that surprised me was that the wives of the couples that had been our friends suddenly would not talk to me, wouldn't have anything to do with me. Their husbands, who had also been our friends, three husbands, came over and made advances to me, and they had the attitude that, oh, I'm alone now, and that we had been such good friends, that if there was ever anything that I wanted or needed, I could call on them. And they didn't mean, you know, to borrow a cup of sugar.

So the men -- I had to withdraw, because I couldn't trust anybody anymore. I had, first of all, to learn to trust myself and my feelings and get reassured that yes, in fact, I was doing the right thing, and then deal with all this other stuff from friends that I had had for many years, ten years, and all of a sudden have the wives feel that I was a threat to them and their marriage, and that I might be wanting to have little affairs on the side because now I'm the gay divorcee.

DORVAL: Does that still happen?

GINGER: Yes. The people are different. Now, since I have moved away, and those particular people are no longer around, now, it's more of oh, she's one of those. You know, now, I'm not sure what people are thinking when they say that to me. All of a sudden it means either that I like to go to singles bars and pick up men. No, I don't like to do that. But if I say I'm a single parent a lot of people assume that. And a lot of men feel that since I'm divorced and a single parent and a single woman, that I can't handle things, and they're more than willing to do whatever they can. I mean I drive in to get gas in the gas station, and the attendant comes up and says, "Hey, babe, how you doing?" And he doesn't say that to everybody. It's not just being funny, you know. And he says, "I'll be glad to drive your car home for you from the tune up." I say, "I bet you would, but no thanks."

I think I went through a period, too, of maybe being a little paranoid in this, and having it happen so much right away, after the divorce, I think maybe certain people said things to me, just being nice, and were sincere, and I read into it. But you get burned so many times and then you start to think things are this way all the time.

SHE ENCOUNTERS DISCRIMINATION IN BANKING AN HOUSING.

CHILD: Are we going to go inside?

GINGER: No, we'll have to go to the drive-in window.

CHILD: I hope I can get money out.

GINGER: Yeah, well, just ask her for a withdrawal slip. They ought to be able to do it, and there's no big line, so there shouldn't be a problem.

CHILD: I want to get money out, too.

GINGER: Okay, I'll ask her for two slips. Hi, do you have a couple of withdrawal slips, please?

TELLER: Withdrawal?

GINGER: Give me your book, please.

CHILD: I want to take out $3.00.

GINGER: All right, just a second.

CHILD: Three dollars.

GINGER: Okay, Mike, how much do you want out?

MIKE: Four.

GINGER: Four dollars?

MIKE: Uh-huh, because you're going to be giving me my allowance and that equals five.

GINGER: Okay.

CHILD: I want three out.

GINGER: You talk about discrimination, when I was looking for a house to rent, or an apartment, or a condominium, anything, I was looking for a three bedroom house, and a lot of places I called to rent three bedroom houses, I got well, we can't rent to you because you have three children instead of two. I said why, and they said, well, because two children will have to share a room and you really need a four bedroom house. I said I'm the one that has to live there with the children doubled up in one room. You're not. Now, why can't I rent a three bedroom house? Well, if you're a single parent you'll have to be working all day and there won't be anyone there to take care of the kids. I said but the kids are in school all day until I get home from work. Well, if you're still a single parent and you're a woman, you're one of those who wouldn't know how to take care of the yard or how to take care of the sprinkling system if it didn't work, or how to repair a toilet. I said, well, I've had some instruction in these things, you know. Now, why can't I rent this house? Well, you know -- there was always an answer, always an answer, and I finally had -- I had made several calls one day, and I finally had hit my limit of patience and I called this one ad in the paper and this man answered and I said, well, I'm interested in the house for rent, and he said, well, it's three bedrooms and gave me all the statistics, and I said, well, okay, I'd like to come by and look at it, and he said, well, you are a family aren't you? I said yes, I have three sons. And he said, oh, you're one of those. And I said what do you mean, I'm one of those? I really was irate at that point on the phone, and I went into some tirade

on the phone and hung up on him. I'm sure the poor man didn't know what had happened.

But you get so much of that that you get angry and you get tough, and sometimes you get not nice.

DORVAL: How often are you put in a situation like that, where you really get angry?

GINGER: Not real often anymore, or maybe I've learned to live with it. I think I've learned to accept a lot of things. I mean I am a single parent. I am a single woman. That means certain things. That means I have a schedule to keep. I have responsibilities. I have to learn how to change a tire. I have to learn how to fix a toilet. I have to know how to mow the lawn. I have to be self-reliant. And I have to think, not only for myself, but for the children.

So maybe instead of saying these things don't happen that often, maybe it's just that I've learned to live with the way it is.

MERROW: Women on their own are not the only single parents who face discrimination. Single fathers face it too.

JIM MAY ENCOUNTERED A MORE SUBTLE FORM OF DISCRIMINATION

MAY: You know, I think there are unique qualitites that a woman contributes to a rounded personality that if they're providing them to their children, they would sense that there must be an absence in a just a one parent family, whether it be the woman absent or the male parent.

GLOWACKI: What about the teachers? Do they have a hard time also?

MAY: Yeah, they might be a little too understanding, you know. They might try to be a little bit -- they might over-compensate a little and I don't want somebody to enter into a relationship or any association with me with too many assumptions, you know, and they tend to do that. They tend to feel like they don't want to make demands on me and, you know, I say tell me when the Christmas party is and I'll send some cookies. "Oh, no," you know, "no, no, no, you've got your hands full." Well, that's an assumption, right? That's not an assusmption they would make if some other parent said that. So you have to cope with all those things. And my friends. Friends, especially women that I would -- you know, single women that I meet have a very hard time with that, you know, assuming that I could actually enjoy this and cope with it. They see it as a coping situation. I don't see it as a

coping situation. I don't think the kids see it as a coping situation. You know, this is our life. It would be a hell of a way to approach your life, as something you cope with.

REINHARDT: Jim May, father of four.

MERROW: Why do we make it so hard for single parents and their children to think of themselves as viable families?

REINHARDT: Do we think they should be punished because the marriage didn't survive? Are we afraid they'll be bad influences on society?

MERROW: Or is it more personal than that? Phyllis Clay of the National Committee for Citizens in Education.

PHYLLIS CLAY SAYS WE SHUN PEOPLE WHO ARE ALONE

CLAY: When I learn that someone else is getting separated, someone else is getting divorced, that raises questions in my own mind about the stability of my own marriage, and some fears. And I think that until I deal with my own fears about what's happening in my own family, then I'm likely to turn the fears that I have about my own situation into suspicions about somebody else and who somebody else is. It's the same way with death. If I don't deal with my own fear of my own death, it's really difficult for me to talk about or think about rationally someone else's death.

REINHARDT: Are we saying that we're still not used to having single parents, that society really hasn't yet accepted them?

CLAY: We come out of a history, just a very short while ago, of there being a very strong stigma attached to being divorced, to being separated. In a lot of circles there still is a strong stigma to that, and the stigma came from a religious persuasion that marriage is made in heaven and once you commit to each other then you are breaking something that God put together, and those kinds of things deal with values, and when a change is made in terms of resistance, values are the hardest things to change. The fact may change. We have many more single parents around. We have many more incidents of separation and divorce than we used to. The laws have changed. That's another fact. Facts are much easier to change. There is less resistance to changing fact than there is to changing values. My hope is that there will be some basic values that people carry throughout their lives.

My concern is that in the meantime we're giving messages to kids that they are not from whole families. You,

Johnny, you, Mary, are from a broken home. And broken carries such a negative connotation to it, that children pick up the message that there's something wrong with them. That's my concern.

My -- I -- I would be sad if we all throughout all of our values, I think that that would be very detrimental, but I also hope that in holding our own values, that we can keep from giving other people who either have different values or happen to find themselves in different situations, that we can keep from telling them that they're bad kids because their parents chose divorce.

GINGER SAYS SHE FEELS VERY CLOSE WITH HER CHILDREN

GINGER: One of the best things I've seen come out of what's happened to us is the relationship that I have with my kids now, is worth it. We're friends. We're still mom and kid, but we're friends. There's understanding. They have been through an experiernce that has given them growth, and we can talk about anything. We can cry in front of each other. We can laugh. We can get angry. And we still go to bed at night loving each other. I don't have to worry anymore about being a certain way, meaning that that's how I felt when I was married, that I had to be a certain way. And now I don't have to deal with that. And a lot of the problems that I had in the marriage of course are gone. And the good things are, you know, going to school and seeing your son get a little award or -- I mean parents do that too, two parent families do that, but somehow being a single parent makes you feel like you've accomplished something more.

Last year for instance, two of my children were picked as outstanding citizens of their classrooms. Now, to me that says I must be doing something right. And those little things, you know. And when -- we have a neat thing that we do on Sundays. We have a Sunday brunch, and I have told the children that this is a real special time and that we can talk about anything they want to talk about and no matter what it is. And I said, "If I don't know the answers to your questions or anything, I'll tell you, but we can still talk about it." And they trust me and I trust them, and that wasn't there before. And there's a certain closeness that's happened, and it's real special. I think that's the best thing. I don't think I would have ever had this relationship with them, staying married.

DR. URI BRONFENBRENNER

BRONFENBRENNER: For a child to develop normally, just normally, requires --

REINHARDT: Uri Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University.

BRONFENBRENNER: -- the involvement, the irrational, enduring involvement of an adult in care and joint activity with that child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid, and not only that, they have to do something with him, play some game, argue, whatever it is. I like to think of it as a ping-pong game. It's a ping-pong game with people who are crazy about each other. That defines the essential condition and it doesn't matter particularly whether these -- you know, whether they're married or unmarried or male or female. It helps if you have both, but tne essential thing is that there be somebody who's really committed to that kid. And who is willing to play ping-pong in whatever language they like to play the game.

And you know what it's like in ping-pong. You start off easy and then it gets faster and soon you're using the backhand and you're learning and the other person's learning. That's how kids learn. You know, and it's not a programmed thing. Nobody ever gave you talking lessons. It just happened in the context of that crazy ping-pong game that we learned to talk and we learned to think, and once we've learned it informally, then we can even learn in school. So that's why my answer to your question is that proposition. Irrational, enduring involvement in joint activity with a kid by one or more persons.

You can be a pretty fancy human being and have been brought up only by your father or only by your mother or only by your Aunt Susie. That's not the critical thing. The critical thing is somebody.

GINGER: You guys walking home? Andy and Jamie, are you walking home? No, Andy's got soccer.

CHILD: I'm not walking home.

CHILD: Me and -- me and --

CHILD: I'm going to have a ride home.

GINGER: With who?

CHILD: With you.

GINGER: Oh, yeah?

CHILD: Yeah.

GINGER: I won't probably be home from work. You wait for Mike, okay? 'Bye-'Bye. I love you. Have a good day.

CHILD: Run you guys. Let's run down --

GINGER: 'Bye-'Bye. Be good.

CHILD: My foot's stuck in the crack.

GINGER: Lift it up. Lift it up. Don't pull it.

CHILD: I'm not.

GINGER: Scoot back and lift it up.

CHILD: I'm trying.

GINGER: Michael, can you help him get his foot out?

MICHAEL: What?

GINGER: Help him get his foot out.

MICHAEL: Can't he go backwards?

GINGER: There you go. Hey. Hug and kiss.

CHILD: No.

GINGER: Come on.

CHILD: Uh-uh.

GINGER: All right. Have a good day. I love you.

CHILD: Hey, mom?

GINGER: Yeah?

CHILD: I love you.

GINGER: I love you too.

REINHARDT: We're grateful to Craig Dorval of member station KPBS in San Diego, for his interview with Ginger Zyskowski and her children. Other material for this program came from Barbara Glowacki, WTGE, Toledo, Ohio.

MERROW: Here in Washington, Options in Education is put together by Associate Producer Mary Rouse, Assistant Producer Rebecca Goldfield, co-host Barbara Reinhardt, and me, John Merrow. Our engineers are Flawn Williams and Andy Rosenberg.

REINHARDT: Those of you who want printed transcripts of all four parts of this report should send $4.00 to National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: The four half-hour cassettes cost $12.00.

REINHARDT: The printed transcript, $4.00. And we have a list of our past programs, free for the asking.

MERROW: Write to us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036. And please tell us the call letters of your own NPR station when you write.

REINHARDT: Options in Education is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University. Support is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

MERROW: This is NPR, National Public Radio.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
A YOUNG GIRL'S REACTION TO THE NEWS OF HER PARENTS' SPLIT-UP	1
A FATHER WHO HAS COME TO RELY ON THE COMPANIONSHIP HIS SIX YEAR OLD DAUGHTER PROVIDES	1-2
TWO SINGLE MOTHERS FROM HAMBURG, NEW YORK	3-4
A GROUP OF BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS POOL RESOURCES	4-5
ANN PARKS REMEMBERS HER FIRST 'PARENTS WITHOUT PARTNERS' MEETING	6-7
SINGLE PARENTS DISCUSSING MUTUAL PROBLEMS AND EXPERIENCES	7-8
A MOTHER WHO RECEIVED HELP FROM HER CHILD'S SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	8-10
A GROUP THERAPY SESSION FOR CHILDREN WITH DIVORCED PARENTS	11-14

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, PART THREE

A YOUNG GIRL'S REACTION TO HER PARENTS' SPLIT-UP

YOUNG GIRL: When it happened to me, when my parents first got separated and the divorce came, I didn't really understand it much because I was too young to. When they told me they were getting a separation, I didn't know what that meant, and I said, "Sure. I'll see you later." Then I, you know, went outside and played with my friends.

Then when the divorce came, then that hit me, like my parents weren't going to live together anymore and they were going to, you know, split up.

MERROW: Divorce is painful, for the child as well as the parents.

REINHARDT: Nearly 11 million children under 18 live in single parent homes. The cause? Usually divorce, sometimes the death of a parent. Their families often experience financial difficulties and emotional strain.

MERROW: They have to cope with our negative assumptions about them, too. Most get by and some manage well. But how? I'm John Merrow.

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt, for Options in Education, with the third in our series about single parent households. How do these families fit in with and get support from the mainstream community around them?

MERROW: Who nurtures the parents who must provide so much nurturance for their children?

REINHARDT: I visited a father who's come to rely on his six year old daughter.

A FATHER WHO HAS COME TO RELY ON THE COMPANIONSHIP HIS SIX YEAR OLD DAUGHTER PROVIDES

FATHER: Did you tell Barbara we went to the ballgame this year?

DAUGHTER: Uh-huh.

REINHARDT: Who was playing?

FATHER: You got a baseball hat. Remember?

DAUGHTER: Uh-huh.

FATHER: What baseball hat do you have?

DAUGHTER: Birds.

FATHER: The Orioles, right? The birds. Right. And we cried [illegible], what, the third inning, because they wouldn't give you a chance at bat. "I want to bat." We were right in a box, right in the front, right behind the first baseline. "I want to bat." "I want to hit the ball." That was good.

DAUGHTER: We wanted to try to get a ball.

FATHER: We sure did. We never got a foul ball, either, did we? But I bought you a hat. That was just as good. Okay.

DAUGHTER: And we got a piece of candy.

FATHER: We got cotton candy, didn't we? It was good.

DAUGHTER: Cotton candy.

FATHER: Cotton candy. That was really good. We had a good day that day. What did we do? We went to inner harbor and we saw all the boats downtown, and then we went to sleep in the park.

DAUGHTER: Uh-huh.

FATHER: We spread a blanket on the ground and went to sleep. Do you want a napkin for that? And then we went to the ballgame.

DAUGHER: Uh-huh.

FATHER: That was fun.

REINHARDT: Don't you ever wish, like just sit at work and just wish you could just come home and not be responsible for anybody but just sort of vegetate or read or just do something all by yourself?

FATHER: Any parent, whether they're a single parent or a total family unit from time to time feels that way. And then I notice when I do manage to have one of those days, the solitude lasts about a day and then you go crazy. You know, it's just you want it back so bad. She's a heck of a companion and I just like to -- I like to talk to her. It's much better with her than without her.

MERROW: Although the child can provide companionship and support, single parents often need to reach out beyond the home to their neighbors.

TWO SINGLE MOTHERS FROM HAMBURG, NEW YORK

MOTHER #1: Two summers ago, it was kind of out of the blue, there were women sitting in this village that thought they were the only ones in that same situation. So Diane and I got together and said we're going to have an unmarried women's party. And we sat around and just talked about where each of us were at at the time, and it was nice, because somebody might have been just starting out and feeling rejected, and somebody else had gone through that but had felt where are they going to go now, and somebody felt that but knew what was out there, and we kind of met on a Friday night, you know, a date night. Got together once a month and spent the time with each other, just sharing things. Not so much, "Boy, I have this story to tell," but more, "You know what I did when I was there?" "Yeah, I felt that too, but this is how I handled it." And we talked about our kids and --

MOTHER #2: We're here to accomplish something, we said. It's really great, you know. You need someone. That's something we were lacking. We have no-one there to pat us on the back. We haven't got anyone that will pat us on the back and say -- or, if we have a great idea but we don't know how to carry it through or are afraid to carry it through, someone just says, "Well, go ahead and do it. You can do it. I know you can do it." We weren't raised that way, and that's another -- that's just a real hard thing to get over.

The support group is the same type of thing. It's -- you know, if you need a little bit of encouragement or a pat on the back -- we call them the unwed mothers, for fun.

But I just met another girl who was going through a divorce and I said, "Gee, you know, have you talked to anybody?" You know, she seemed very bitter and it's the first stages or whatever, but I said, "It really helps if you have a couple of girls that you can get together with and bounce things off and say, well, you know, how did you handle it, or what happened." Or one of the things that we've all went through, the first thing of the divorce, "Let's check out the old boyfriends from high school." The first thing that goes through your mind is, "I wonder what he's doing." "I could have married him." You know. Should it have been, or did I make a mistake, or you know. And we found out all of us did that. We all immediately thought of an old boyfriend, and wondered what he was doing, if he was still free or available and various one of us looked them up. Other ones just daydreamed or got it out of our system. Whatever.

MOTHER #1: The place that we're at now, we're running a very successful household. We both are doing -- Diane is in school full time. I have a full time job. We're both involved in our children's activities. We're really sitting very nicely where we are. We have occasional dates. We can go out and have a nice time. Then we look at all these couples. If we run into somebody and there's a group of couples around the table, you know, we hear this -- we sit there and we're doing whatever we want to do. We're independent and we are confident with ourselves and what we have accomplished in a couple of years. We've got nice self esteems now, and we look across the table and there's a couple that's sitting over there that -- "Do you really want that other drink?" You know, we see all these things that we could be possibly in. It's scarey.

MOTHER #2: I was just going to say I think it's fear, because it's so easy to slip back into. "I think it's time to go home." "You've had too much to drink." "How come you haven't fixed the toilet yet?" And you know, we can be these really fantastic, independent women, but give us a man and we'd turn out the same way again probably and -- but you know, you just hope you're learning something. So I think right now we're in the best situation we can be in because we're very vulnerable to slipping back into that.

MERROW: Two single mothers in Hamburg, New York.

REINHARDT: In some communities, the number of single parent households is large enough to form a network. Four single mothers in the Washington, D. C. area describe how they pool resources.

A GROUP OF BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS POOL RESOURCES

MOTHER : Many times, when your salary is short and, you know, you have things that are to be taken care of, you know, outside of your salary, we exchange, you know, clothing, you know, like hand-me-downs, as if we were in a family. As far as a lot of times, like breakfast and what have you, you know, if one person is running short, you know, food-wise, you know, or lunch or dinner, you know, we help each other out in that way.

MOTHER : Because like this morning I had breakfast and I called my girlfriend over, and her husband just left yesterday, so I called her over for breakfast, and she has two kids, too. And we'll do that a lot. She keeps the kids for me, if I have to go out, if I work late or, you know, whatever, she'll keep the kids and feed them and we exchange favors like that, and it's a big help.

MOTHER : As far as babystting, we all have little things

like I'm in Tupperware. Another girl is selling Stanley Products. When she has a show, I keep her kids. When I have a show, they keep mine. Or like when we have to do errands, we try to find out who needs what, you know, and all of us do it jointly, you know, like if somebody's going in one direction to the store, she'll get it for everybody, and if I have to go like to the post office or maybe to the thrift store or, you know, we sort of look out for each other.

You know, we do little favors for each other, so it comes back in another form and it's not something that's preplanned. We just -- it just -- you know the need and it's just done. Like if I were to go to the store, they may get food stamps, I could be short. You know, they'll get what I need or you know, it's just a share and we don't have a formal plan or anything like that. We just know the need and we do it, you know, when we can.

INTERVIEWER: Any other kind of help that you give each other that you didn't mention?

MOTHER: We give the emotional strength. That's so necessary, especially -- okay, the girls that I know and associate with, they are single parents and you know, the children and being without a man around the house, it gets you down every so often, and you need somebody to say, well, you know, it's necessary to have somebody sometime there for the emotional comfort and the strength.

But then you say, well, you know, the person is feeling bad or whatever, and you come over, well, look, we can work it out somehow. And you get out and you find an outlet. You go out a little while. You play cards. You do something, you know, just to fill that energy, you do something.

MOTHER: This happens for me where I live, say once a week, because the girls usually come down and kind of let their hair out in somebody's apartment, and we may have wine or something and we'll just sit and talk and everything. It usually happens about once a week where I live.

INTERVIEWER: And what happens -- where are the kids? Who's taking care of the kids when all the ladies get together?

MOTHER: They are all there. They are all there.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you're all making a lot of sacrifices, a lot of personal sacrifice.

MOTHER: Oh, yeah, definitely. That's the whole story, I'm telling you.

MOTHER: Women have always made sacrifices, moreso than men. Always. That's history, to me. That is history.

MOTHER: Not just to you, but -- because in my family --

MOTHER: To women.

MOTHER: To women, and in particular to black women. We've always had to carry the burden of the family, period. That's the care of the children, the discipline, the cleaning, the cooking, the money. You know, it's just tradition for us and it's a way of life and we adapt to it very easily, and we don't feel that we're really doing any big thing. It's what we're supposed to do.

MOTHER: It's what we were raised with, because my momma raised six of us without a man there in the house, you know. I was raised with the idea, I mean coming from my mother, that you know, you're foolish to think that you have one man to yourself for any length of time. You're just not raised with that idea, with that concept.

INTERVIEWER: What of your sons, for those of you who have sons?: Do you think your sons are now getting the idea that the man can be free and doesn't have to be responsible for his family, and your daughters are learning that they have this tremendous responsibility? Or are you in some way trying to break what might be a cycle?

MOTHER: Well, my sons, they hurt, okay, quite a bit, you know, because they see the family situation, okay, on my side moreso than my husband's side, okay. And they hurt from their dad and mom not being together, and they constantly tell me, "Well, mommy, I'm going to pray for my wife and I'm going to take care of my children no matter what." Both of my sons.

MOTHER: A police officer helped me, because he was the only -- okay, like I'm talking about Maryland -- he was the only black police officer on the force, and he was -- I think my son was referred to him because he had thrown some rocks and hit a car. And he was the one actually that helped me tell him about his changing and his growing of his beard and all of that. I couldn't -- Kevin was embarassed. He couldn't really -- part of it he let me go and do, but he's taken my son, like on little trips, just him and my son, and --

INTERVIEWER: This is the policeman?

MOTHER: Uh-huh. And it's helped him.

MERROW: Neighborhood support isn't always readily available

to single parents and their children. Some people join formal organizations to lessen their sense of isolation. They meet regularly, to share their experiences as single parents.

ANN PARKS REMEMBERS HER FIRST 'PARENTS WITHOUT PARTNERS' MEETING

PARKS: You never forget that first meeting. It takes a lot of courage to go to a meeting where you don't know anyone. And I was feeling pretty sorry for myself. I had three very small children, 5, 3 and just a couple of months old. And when I walked in, after I got the courage to open the door, it seemed like everyone knew everyone else but me, of course. You felt very much an outsider, which is typical of being a single parent in more or less a couple society, especially in 1964.

At the end of the meeting, I was feeling very sorry for myself, but I stuck it out and waited in line for coffee, and someone asked me, she said, "This is your first meeting, isn't it?" And I said yes, in sort of a tremulous voice, and she said, "You know, people aren't going to come to you. You're going to have to go to them."

MERROW: Ann Parks joined Parents Without Partners, a national organization with 190,000 members.

REINHARDT: These people found each other through their church.

SINGLE PARENTS DISCUSSING MUTUAL PROBLEMS AND EXPERIENCES

PARENT: Her father called me up today and told me I was influencing her, bad mouthing him.

PARENT: How so?

PARENT: Well, he said that -- he said that she said that I said that he was a stinker. Now, I can't imagine me saying to my daughter --

PARENT: You wouldn't say that.

PARENT: Well, it's not my word, so obviously she's picked up -- I think I probably said something to her after the day of the trial, when I was very upset, that I was upset, that I was unhappy with her father. She knows and she's very sensitive. There's no point in lying to her and saying, "Oh, I'm terrific. I'm wonderful." I think I just said that I was unhappy about what had happened, or --

PARENT: I've been very careful about that, not to say anything bad about him, but sometimes, every now and then

something will creep through and Susanna will say to me, "Well, after all, he is my father." And I really don't say anything bad about him. It's just an attitude that I can't help.

PARENT: There's not too much you can do about that. It's not like you're -- it's not a conscious program to manipulate the kid, but --

PARENT: I'd like to hear some of the women on one subject that has not been well studied, is how single parents encourage as I guess we all realize we have to do, mutual parenting. That is, how we encourage parenting together with our spouses, many of whom are remote, at least. I mean I think it is a problem that single parents have that married parents automatically do not have, and I think it's a tough problem for single parents.

PARENT: I'm gradually trying to get in touch with this girl friend of my husband's who he spends a great deal of time with, who is extremely loving and concerned about my daughter and does all kinds of things for her, including doing her hair, giving her baths, selecting her clothes, babysitting for her, and clearly, this is the easiest path to go. And I mean we've so far just gone to, "Say hello to Laura for me," and Laura says hello to me, but I'm sure I will soon be able to talk directly to her, and again, bypass all the hostility or problems or whatnot with the father and go through the girl friend.

MERROW: Sometimes just airing grievances is enough. Other times, more direct help is needed.

REINHARDT: This mother got help from her son's school counselor, Nancy McGrath.

A MOTHER WHO RECEIVED HELP FROM HER CHILD'S SCHOOL COUNSELOR

MOTHER: In the beginning, Jamie had a very difficult time talking to me because he felt like it was all my fault, and all I would have to do would be to either stop in the morning or send a note in to Mrs. McGrath, and tell her what problem I was having with him, and then she would then talk to him and he would talk to her and tell her exactly what was on his mind and what he was feeling and how he felt about it, and she would kind of explain things to him and put him a little bit at ease.

REINHARDT: What kinds of problems would he have?

MOTHER: We would have what I call screaming sessions between him and I, because he didn't want to do what I wanted him to do, and he wouldn't get ready for school or he wouldn't do his homework the night before, or you know, and it would all be boiled

down to that I was mean to him and you know, he didn't love me, and everything was my fault. And it would just get to a point with me where I could take it so long, but then it would get me emotionally upset, and instead -- you know, I would see that we were screaming at one another, so instead of screaming I would come in and I would usually talk to Mrs. McGrath for a little while, and she would then talk to him and try to -- you know, tell him that it was all right for him to say that he doesn't love me, that he hates me, get it out if that's what he's feeling. Which he did and which wasn't easy to take, but you know, I knew what he was going through because I was sort of going through the same thing.

REINHARDT: How long did that last?

MOTHER: Well, we had periods of -- it depended on what kind of situation his father was in at the time. There would be times when instead of his father reinforcing him, that you know, it was just a mutual thing between him and me, and that there was just nothing that could be done about it.

REINHARDT: What do you mean, instead of his father reinforcing him?

MOTHER: Well, instead of his father reinforcing the fact that he shouldn't put the blame on somebody, a lot of times when you're upset you tend to blame the other party, and to a seven year old, you know, his daddy -- he wanted his daddy to know that he loved him and he, you know, would stick by him, really. And he just would, you know, occasionally make statements to my son, and then he would come home and he would be all upset.

Well, when he would be upset because of his father, then he was upset with me. I mean he would come through the door on a Sunday evening, after being with his father all weekend, and it would be like a tornado was going through the house, he was just so upset. And it was just very difficult for me to talk to him because I was the bad guy in his eyes.

So then I would see Mrs. McGrath and she would talk to him and reason things out with him, and then things would settle down. And then occasionally there would be another uproar in his father's life that would upset him and he would speak out to his son, and then he would get upset again.

But it went on a good -- oh, I guess a good year or 14 months. It was a long time. And we have just gotten our divorce. It was final in August. And since that time Jamie has been exceptional. I think he was put to ease as much as we were. He's kind of relaxed with it now.

REINHARDT: What do you think the divorce seemed to say to him, the actual getting the papers themselves?

MOTHER: I think then he believed that we were telling him the truth, that we weren't, you know, going to go back together. It was a final thing and it was going to be permanent. I think he had some hope, even though we kept reinforcing that there wasn't any hope that we were all three going to be together again, and I think finally when I told him that it was over and daddy was going his way and I was going mine, but that we both loved him, he sort of relaxed with it for some reason I don't know. Mrs. McGrath tells me that they have strange ways that they accept things, and she's right.

REINHARDT: What about your son's friends? What was their reaction to all of this?

MOTHER: Well, in the beginning, I think my son was really upset because he had this great fear that he was the only child in school that didn't have two parents that were together. He thought there wasn't anybody else in this world that had parents that were separated. And by Mrs. McGrath putting him into her little group therapy classes that she had, he then found out that there were quite a few children in the school and in his class that are from separated parents.

REINHARDT: How did you know that was such a surprise to him?

MOTHER: He came home one day and he was in the bathroom, cleaning up for supper, and he called me and he said, "Guess what?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "So and so, his mother and father are separated too." And you know, I just said to him, "See, I told you you're not the only one." He said, "Yeah, that was really neat. We all got together and started talking, and all these kids have separated parents." You know, and he was just really excited about it. And then he had this little boy that comes over and plays with him in the summertime and who I didn't know was from a separated family, and they were outside talking one time and my mother was outside and she overheard the conversation, which was the little boy was talking to my son and he said, "My stepfather --," and he was talking about him, and my son wanted to know, well, you know, what's a stepfather. And he said, "Well, my mommy and daddy are separated and my mommy remarried and I have a stepfather." He's not my real father, but he's my stepfather." And he said to Jamie, "Well, if your mother ever gets married you'll have one too." And my son hollered to my mother, "Is that right, Mom-mom? Will I have a stepfather?" He was all excited, you know, like this was going to be something really nice to have, really neat, you know, we're going to have something else.

So he -- you know, once he found out he wasn't alone with all of it, he seemed to be able to cope a little better with that part of it.

MERROW: A single mother in Baltimore, Maryland.

REINHARDT: Only a handful of schools have counselling groups for children from single parent households. In Port Washington, New York, the service is available at some elementary schools, but not at the junior highs.

MERROW: A group of junior high kids who had been in counselling together when they were in elementary school, met this fall for a talk with their counselor and reporter Rebecca Goldfield. During their reunion, they quickly picked up where they'd left off.

A GROUP THERAPY SESSION FOR CHILDREN WITH DIVORCED PARENTS

CHILD: Every once in awhile, my father won't see us for two months or so, and I was like, "What's going on?" And I asked my mother and she'd say, "He doesn't want to pay us," and I'd try to get in touch with my father, but my mother would get mad if I said, "Ma, I want to go see my father." She'll get mad at me. She'll be like, "But he's not paying us. Why do you think he's so good?" You know, she thinks like -- like she thinks that I look up -- that I look up to him, but she goes, you know, "He's not a good father. He doesn't pay us enough," and all this stuff. And my father --

GOLDFIELD: So you're kind of caught in the middle, huh?

CHILD: Yeah. I can't go to either side, but I don't want to go to either side. I just want it just to stop. I see him on the weekends. Two years ago, I used to think maybe they'd get back together, but now I say no, no way.

GOLDFIELD: Do you think it helps you all to be with other kids who've had the same kind of experience?

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: We talk more. We talk more freely.

CHILD: Because they know what you're talking about. They know exactly what you're talking about.

GOLDFIELD: When it first happened to you, did you feel like

the only kid in the school?

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: Very much so.

CHILD: You feel like you're alone. Nobody else seems to know how you feel or know what you're going through.

CHILD: My friends, when they ask me what's going on, like they say, "Whose care is that?" I say, "That's my mother's boy friend," and I have to explain to them that my mother and father are divorced.

CHILD: Exactly.

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: You've got to tell, like, "My mother and father are divorced," and it doesn't feel right, saying it like that.

CHILD: You get embarassed about it, because you always have to tell somebody or other. There's always somebody new who doesn't know about it.

GOLDFIELD: And it's embarassing for you?

CHILD: Yeah. When you just -- they ask you a question and you have to go through this long explanation about it, what happened.

GOLDFIELD: But if you think it's not your fault, then why would you be embarassed?

CHILD: You just feel embarassed that you're different. You're different from them and you have to go through it. It was really just a big surprise when it happened. I mean you hadn't noticed that they were fighting or anything. All of a sudden, one day I heard them fighting, and then my mother came out and she came out and told me that she was going to get divorced.

CHILD: When it happened to me, when my parents first got separated and the divorce came, I didn't really understand it much, because I was always too young to. When they told me they were thinking of getting a separation, I didn't know what that meant, and I said, "Sure, I'll see you later." And I, you know, went outside and played with my friends. And then, when the divorce came, in a way that hit me, that like my parents weren't

going to live together anymore, and they were going to, you know, split up. And like my sister would like just cry and everything, because she didn't want him to leave, and she just would get very upset.

CHILD: Me too. Like when he used to have to pick us up and then drop us off on a Sunday, like he'd pick us up on a Saturday morning and drop us off on a Sunday night, I'd like -- I'd be in tears, like why does he have to leave. Why can't he just stay with us.

GOLDFIELD: When did that stop happening?

CHILD: It really doesn't. Like I'm always thinking like that, like he does it every week still, but like you know, still I'd like to be with him all the time and I'd also like to be with my mother. There's no way I would ever want to make a choice of which one I would want to go with, because like you know, I love them both and whatever one I have to go with I'll go with.

MERROW: Next on Options in Education, how these children fare in most schools.

REINHARDT: If you'd like a transcript of our four part series on single parent households, send us $4.00. Cassettes are $12.00.

MERROW: Write us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C., 20036.

REINHARDT: That's $4.00 for the complete printed transcript and $12.00 for the cassettes.

MERROW: And please tell us the call letters of your own local NPR station.

REINHARDT: Our address again, National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

GOLDFIELD: You know, I see that you talk among yourselves and you agree --

CHILD: I want this program again.

GOLDFIELD: What?

CHILD: I want it again.

GOLDFIELD: You want to continue it?

CHILD: Yeah.

CHILD: I like it.

GOLDFIELD: Do you find that you help each other? You know what I mean?

CHILD: This is the only way we talk.

CHILD: Right.

CHILD: We don't ever --

CHILD: Who am I going to tell? He's the only one that I talk to. We're the only people.

CHILD: That's right. Who am I going to say this to?

GOLDFIELD: This is the only place you can do it?

CHILD: I don't want to say it to my mother. I don't want to say it to my father. I don't know which one to say it to. This is a good thing. I like it. I'll stay.

CHILD: Outside of this group, I don't really talk to anybody else.

GOLDFIELD: Do people ever tease you or anything like that, about it?

CHILD: I don't care who it is. I don't care if it's Richie Contino, I'll jump on him.

GOLDFIELD: People never say anything to you about it?

CHILD: Yeah, nobody ever really talks about it. It's just sort of an out of the way thing that you have at the back of your mind, but it's really there.

MERROW: Options in Education is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University. Support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: Options in Education is produce by John Merrow. Our Associate Producer is Mary Rouse. The Assistant Producer is Rebecca Goldfield. Some of the material for this program came from Rob Shaefer, WBFO, Buffalo, New York. Technical assistance by Dave Glasser, Gary Fink and John Widoff. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. This is NPR, National Public Radio.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
A YOUNG GIRL SAYS THAT HER SCHOOL GROUP THERAPY PROGRAM HELPS HER TO TALK ABOUT HER PROBLEMS	1
SINGLE FATHER GEORGE MC CULLY DESCRIBES HIS CHILD'S TEACHER'S STEREOTYPES ABOUT HIM.	1-2
PHYLLIS CLAY OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR CITIZENS IN EDUCATION TELLS ANOTHER STEREOTYPE STORY	2
GEORGE MC CULLY SAYS THAT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LED TO SOME DISTORTED HEADLINES	3-4
JOHN OURTH DEFENDS THE STUDY	5-6
TEACHERS WHO WENT TO A WORKSHOP WHICH THEY SAY INCREASED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN FROM SINGLE PARENT HOMES	7-8
A GROUP DISCUSSION WITH KIDS WHOSE PARENTS HAVE DIVORCED	8-9
COUNSELORS LEE-ANN LEIGHTON AND MARGARET GALANTE WHO ORGANIZED THE GROUPS	9-10
TEACHER MARY ANN GONZALES ENCOURAGES HER FIRST GRADERS TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES	10-12

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, PART FOUR

A YOUNG GIRL SAYS HER SCHOOL GROUP THERAPY PROGRAM
HELPS HER TO TALK ABOUT HER PROBLEMS

YOUNG GIRL: Till a little while ago, I've always kept things inside me. I keep them bottled up because I never really had anybody to talk to. It was so much harder. And now it's like really good to talk to just, you know, your friends, because outside of this group I don't really talk to anybody else.

MERROW: This group is a handful of sixth graders who have regular sessions with their school counselor.

REINHARDT: What do the kids have in common? They no longer live in a two parent household. Their parents are divorced.

MERROW: Single parent households, the majority of which result from divorce or the death of a parent, are growing in number.

REINHARDT: There are six million of them. That's up 80 percent since 1970. During the same ten years, the number of two parent homes shrank. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, with the final part of this Options in Education series on single parent households. How are schools responding to this new kind of family.

REINHARDT: All too often with old biases.

MERROW: School people, like the rest of us, have some misconceptions about single parents.

SINGLE FATHER GEORGE MC CULLY DESCRIBES HIS CHILD'S
TEACHER'S STEREOTYPES ABOUT HIM

MC CULLY: I was told by one teacher that I ought to be slicing my children's -- I ought to be cutting my children's sandwiches. I don't know, in half I guess, or something like that. And I, you know, responded that of course my son -- that is, the reason I didn't cut them was that he didn't want them cut, and she said, "Oh, well, I thought you just didn't know that because you're a male."

REINHARDT: Did she really say that?

MC CULLY: She said that. And you know, I was -- I came to an appointment with the teacher, a conference, and she said -- and I was on time -- and she said, "Oh, I didn't know you'd be on time,

and I thought you might forget. Men are so busy and distracted that they --," you know, blah, blah, blah. It was as if because I was a father that I really would not be quite up to snuff as a parent, and I think with single fathers the bias against single parenthood is likely to acquire overtones of sexism.

REINHARDT: Aggravating as those sex role stereotypes are, some stereotypes, like that of the broken home, actually harm children. Phyllis Clay.

PHYLLIS CLAY, OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR CITIZENS IN EDUCATION, TELLS ANOTHER STEREOTYPE STORY

CLAY: A child was getting stamps, a rubber stamp on the back of her hand when she would go to lunch.

REINHARDT: That's to say she paid or something?

CLAY: Right, exactly. And she liked those and was sort of collecting them, and so therefore was not washing the backs of her hands. The cafeteria worker noticed that one day, that she had a number of those stamps, and so sent her to the nurse. The school nurse asked her questions about when she had taken a bath last, how often she took a bath, who was at home with her when she took a bath, who supervised her bathing, those kinds of questions. And then called her older brother in and asked him the same questions, and did not get around to asking any questions about why are you saving those or why do you have those on your hands or do you like them, or anything like that, which was actually why she had them on her hands.

The -- both children were in tears by the end of the session, and at that point -- even at that point the parent was not called in. When the children got home and were talking about it, the parent went to the school and was told, "Well, we know that you have lots on your hands and lots to worry about and we didn't want to bother you." But when they had bothered the children and asked those questions about who's caring for you, is somebody there when your parent is at work, those kinds of questions, indicated an assumption that a single parent is not going to care for the child.

MERROW: Phyllis Clay. She studied single parent households for the National Committee for Citizens in Education

Perhaps the most devastating stereotype of all is the one that expects bad behavior from the children.

REINHARDT: When we assume that kids from single parent households don't get enough attention and supervision at home,

then we're likely to expect them to misbehave in school and do poorly in their studies.

MERROW: Unfortunately, children pick up on these expectations and begin to believe bad things about themselves.

REINHARDT: A recent study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the Kettering Foundation has inadvertent' done a lot to perpetuate these stereotypes. It announced t' children from single parent households perform worse in sch han their counterparts from two parent homes.

MERROW: cording to the study, kids from one parent homes make lower g s, are absent and suspended more often, and are more than twice as likely to drop out of school.

REINHARDT: The press reported the story with headlines like, "Children of divorce have major difficulties in school," and, "Broken homes found to hurt school work."

MERROW: The study's author said they were trying to make schools more sensitive to these children's needs.

REINHARDT: But some folks found fault with the study.

GEORGE MC CULLY SAYS THAT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LED TO SOME DISTORTED HEADLINES

MC CULLY: I think what happened in short was that the report presented less than we already know, as if it were all that we know, and in that process distorted -- presented a distorted view of what the facts are. And in doing so, it happened to perpetuate the myth, now presented as fact, now seeming to acquire empirical support, that single parent children simply make poor students, as the Boston Herald American had it.

REINHARDT: George Mc Cully, a single father himself, is a member of a task force on single parent services for the Episcopal Church in Massachusetts.

MC CULLY: The report is not about children in school. It's about te records that schools now have of their students. Yes, people do make records, but not the subjects of those records alone. The records are also made by the record keepers, and with respect to single parent children, this is especially important. If a single parent child is absent from school, the assumption is that he or she is sick, but large low income single parent families often keep their older children at home to take care of the younger children who are sick, in order to allow the parents to stay on the job.

The school does not perceive this as a special situation. Its experience, over the years, applying one category to all of its students, is that an absence equals an illness or truancy. And the question arises of course as to whether or not what actually occurred is behavior that needs discipline, or behavior that needs support. Is this older child who is engaged in nurturing and who is helping a different kind of family structure get through the exigencies of life, is that child doing the same thing that a child who stays away from school because he or she is sick, or because they simply want to stay away from school.

To take another example, there were a very small number of children who did not -- who dropped out of school. Now, the report presented these children as giving up on school. That is the phrase from the report. An especially alarming statistic, it said, in some ways the most troubling of all, was the data that X number of children gave up on school. Well, the evidence for that was simply that the children ceased to go to school. Now, whether or not those were children from poor families who had to interrupt their education at the insistence of a parent, not of the child himself, in order to get a job and supply some income to a family that needed it badly, was not known.

The school perceived this as dropping out of school, and alleged that the children were giving up on school.

REINHARDT: The report said this.

MC CULLY: The report said that. And -- that's right, the schools, who knows what they thought. The report didn't penetrate the minds of the schools. It simply recorded thei records in the crudest form.

So, the report was not an analysis of real events. It was simply a counting of instances recorded under very crude categories for all students at once, broken down into two groups, alleged to be one parented and two parented, and then further alleged to -- that that relationship was more than just a statistical correlation, that it had some causal significance. And from this was spun out this myth about problems that single parent children are having in school.

Well, to be sure they're having problems, but is this -- is it that they are having problems because they are single parented, or as is more likely, that they're having problems in the school and that they are single parented, both because they have been under family stress. That we don't know, because the reports simply didn't penetrate that far.

MERROW: George Mc Cully, a member of a single parent task force for the Episcopal Church in Massachusetts.

Barbara, you looked at the study. What do you think?

REINHARDT: Well, I find it worrisome, and I think this is why. First of all, the fact that low income groups have a higher proportion of single parent households has got to skew the results. If a group as a whole is doing poor in a school, well then it's too easy to assume it's because they have only one parent at home, and not because they've got disadvantages from being poor.

Another thing is when the divorce or death happened just a few months ago, it's very likely the child is under stress, whereas if it happened six years ago he may be doing fine. You see, the study lumped all so-called one parent kids together. And finally, why couldn't a child's performance be affected by school personnel who don't understand him and his changed life. Because the study didn't break the results down by schools, you can't tell whether children whose teachers are supportive do better than children whose teachers aren't.

MERROW: The authors of the study say that in the next two years they will be breaking down the numbers to find the meaning. But, Barbara, it sounds as if what you're saying is they shouldn't have released the numbers until they had the meaning.

REINHARDT: That's right.

MERROW: John Ourth, the President of the group that did the study, has a rebuttal.

JOHN OURTH DEFENDS THE STUDY

OURTH: We do have a study with numbers, and we do know that these children manifest a certain risk.

REINHARDT: But you don't have any idea that it has anything to do with their being single parented, yet.

OURTH: Well, we certainly can't reject that theory. If -- I don't believe that one could say that it has nothing to do with it, because I think if we look at the very simple statistics kept by the medical records regarding people who have gone through divorce, I think the rate is either eight or twelve times higher for a physical trauma of some physical ailment, after divorce, within a period of -- a short period of time, one to two years, and I can't believe that children, who are human beings, would be

any less likely to suffer some feeling or some problems as a result of the trauma of the family coming apart than an adult would.

So I'm not -- I certainly would not agree with that statement.

REINHARDT: I think that intuition would tell us that at the moment of any kind of family change there's a lot of stress frequently, and certainly the children are going to undergo that stress too.

But the problem, of course, with giving a bunch of numbers and not including things like the income of the families, I mean really, before, for instance, there was a divorce, or the time of the break, how far the child is away from that break, if he's right in the middle of it. You know, just including all the children together and giving out those numbers to the public, you know that what the public is going to do, it will see the numbers and then it will see meaning. It will infer single parented kids have a real disadvantage just because they come from a family where there's only one parent in the household.

OURTH: Well, that might be an inference, or they might do as you have done so well, say that there are additional questions that need to be asked, and I think that you have done aq good job here of suggesting that there are other questions to ask. And I --

REINHARDT: The problem is, of course, I read the study, and I doubt if very many people have.

OURTH: Well, that may be, but it's like anything dealing with information to the public. They do not all have the opportunity that you have, and we're happy that you did read it and we share your concern that appropriate kinds of information and that we issue the same caveat everywhere we go, do not stereotype these children, but this information ought to draw attention to the fact that there may be circumstances in children's lives over which they have no control that may influence, and this one is statistically significant, although there may also be additional factors.

MERROW: John Ourth, of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Ourth says one of the goals of the study is more workshops on the needs of children from single parent households.

REINHARDT: In these workshops, some of which already exist, teachers, school nurses and principals look at what ever negative assumptions they might have against such families and talk about how they can be sensitive to the children's needs.

MERROW: Third grade teacher Leona Kimmel, went to one of the workshops. She and Jo Anne Schaefer spoke with Barbara at their school in Baltimore County, Maryland.

TEACHERS WHO WENT TO A WORKSHOP WHICH THEY SAY INCREASED THEIR UNERSTANDING OF CHILDREN FROM SINGLE PARENT HOMES

KIMMEL: I used to -- you know, when I'd have a child acting out I wouldn't know what could be the problem. I'd just say, you know, they're just being ornery. But since the course I've gotten to the point where I figure, you know, the big question to ask is what's going on at home. And so very often it would come out when she was talking with the child or if I was talking with the child, or then when I invited the parent in for a conference, it would all come out.

SCHAEFER: The biggest problem I see going on with the youngsters I work with would be that the children quite often feel that they're in the middle, and they want to take sides kind of, but that's so emotional they don't know how to handle that.

REINHARDT: Can you give me an example, a child that you've seen do that?

SCHAEFER: Yes. I had a youngster that lived with Mom, but had visiting privileges with Dad on the weekends, and after the weekend was over on Monday, he would be just emotionally like a turmoil. He would have trouble adusting and have lots of extra energy on the playground which he might get into fights or things like this were he was just so anxious about the situation, not knowing how to cope. He loved both parents. He loves them very dearly and didn't know who was right, and they were having problems and were expressing their problems directy to the youngster in an emotional kind of way which wasn't very helpful to him.

REINHARDT: How do you have time to worry about what happened at home when you've got to teach those children math and science and so many hours of this and so many hours of that and make sure that they get this many skills in reading and all that kind of stuff. How do you have time?

KIMMEL: I just say it's a matter of being more aware and Jo Anne mentioned encouragement. I think that's really important. Or, you know, maybe while the rest of the kids are on the way to art or something, I might straggle behind with this child and, you know, just kind of find out what's going on. Very often I'll just ask someone to come to my desk and say, you know, is there a problem somewhere, is something bothering you? I've been

wondering, because you haven't been paying attention very well. Something like that.

And I think it's not that you get rid of all requirements and don't expect the child to do anything. It's like, you know, I understand this might take you longer, or you might be upset about this, but you know, you can do it and I'll help you do it. And this is -- you know, I think, too, with these kids you have to show them that, you know, at least school is a place where you can count on this and this an this happening, you know, and we're going to try to keep these emotional things, you know, to a minimum. So at least you can feel secure here while this other stuff is going on.

MERROW: Leona Kimmel and Jo Anne Schaefer, teachers at Logan Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland.

A GROUP DISCUSSION WITH KIDS WHOSE PARENTS HAVE DIVORCED

INTERVIEWER: Somebody once said parents should be friendly with each other after a divorce. How do you feel about that?

CHILD: Yes, that's true, because if they don't get along they're going to just keep arguing about the alimony, possession of the kids, you know, visitation rights. They're always going to argue about that. And they've got to work it out, you know. They've got to be calm. They're adults. I think sometimes we can do that and they can't, you know what I mean?

REINHARDT: If a child is lucky enough his school might have a group like this one in Port Washington, New York. These students from single parent households get together once a week.

CHILD: When they're friends they're still going to be fighting again, because there's always the problem of the money. They're always going to fight over that. I don't -- I mean no matter what happens. The way my mother makes it sound, she makes it sound like he doesn't give us anything, and when I'm talking to him, he makes it sound like my mother's really bad and she does all these bad things. And now it sounds like they both do wrong things.

INTERVIEWER: Then you would say that most of the arguments between your parents has to do with money?

CHILD: And I think visitation rights.

CHILDREN: Yeah.

CHILD: Those are the two major things.

CHILD: That's together, the money and the visitation rights are both combined, because if your father doesn't pay, your mother won't let you see him, because she's like --

CHILD: Yeah, but he's entitled to you, so she has to --

CHILD: No, he's not, if he doesn't pay.

CHILD: No.

CHILD: Yes, he's entitled to you no matter what.

CHILD: But if he doesn't pay the right amount he's --

CHILD: He's supposed to pay the right amount, and if he doesn't pay, then he shouldn't get to see us, because how are we going to live?

CHILD: No matter what, I can't see her if he doesn't put up the money, and I can't see him if she doesn't put up the money.

CHILD: Does your father have to pay your mother alimony?

CHILD: Yes.

CHILD: In my family, my father did not pay the alimony, because he didn't have it that much. He didn't have that much money because he wasn't working, because he was -- you could call it he was spending too much money on drinking and stuff, and he like, you know, didn't have his job, and it's like -- I still saw him.

MERROW: Counselors Lee-Ann Leighton organized the group after they realized that kids wouldn't talk about their proolems in individual counseling sessions.

COUNSELORS LEE-ANN LEIGHTON AND MARGARET GALANTE

COUNSELOR: Children felt that there was a lack of loyalty if they would be speaking to a stranger about the problems that occurred at home, and even though they had their mother's permission to speak with the psychologist, they felt very uncomfortable.

COUNSELOR: They also felt ashamed. What we notice in the group is I always begin the group with, "Do you know why you're here?" And someone will come up and say, "Oh, yes, because my parents are divorced." And inevitably, all the other children will say, "What? Your parents too?" It's like, "I only thought it was happening to me." So there's a shame element involved

also, why they didn't want to discuss it. Also, maybe if I don't talk about it it won't happen. There's always the hope that this will be resolved.

CHILD: You know, he was drinking too much, getting into too many accidents with his cars, and she tried that. Taking away the kids might help him, you know, because it would hurt him in a way. But it didn't really help.

COUNSELOR: Do you think that parents should hide their feelings about each other in front of the kids? Do you think they should --

CHILD: No. I think they should be more feeling, because --

CHILD: Sometimes, because when the kid is growing up and he doesn't know what's going on, he hears all this bunch of words, divorce, alimony, child support. The kid doesn't know what's happening.

CHILD: But if they keep it from the kid it hurts the kid, because -- it's going to hurt the kid not knowing and knowing that their parents are not leveling with them. And it's time they have to learn.

COUNSELOR: Do you think children should know everything that's going on?

CHILD: Pretty much, because they have top learn what's happening in their family.

CHILD: I think there ought to be a group for the parents as well as the children.

MERROW: A counseling group at a public school in Port Washington, New York.

REINHARDT: Very few children from single parent homes get the chance to be in such a group at school.

MERROW: With luck they'll have a teacher like Mary Ann Gonzels, who starts her first graders' day with sharing time.

TEACHER MARY ANN GONZALES ENCOURAGES HER FIRST GRADERS TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES

GONZALES: It's a time for the children to say and share whatever is important to them, and there have been times -- this morning Noah came in and said, "Guess what? My mother went to the hospital and we have a new baby sister." You know, and everyone said, "Oh, wow, congratulations," you know, and so that kind of

thing, that's what the sharing is all about. And --

REINHARDT: But do children bring up problems at a time like that?

GONZALES: I can remember an incident last year where a child came in and said, "I'm very upset. You know, the police came last weekend and took my father off in a -- in their car, because my mother didn't want him there, and I don't know what's going to happen." And, you know, he was really afraid. And so we talked about it. Right there, right then, we stopped and his parents had been separated a short time, and there were a couple of other children in the classroom whose parents had been separted or divorced for longer periods of time, and they were the ones that provided the support for this child and said, you know, it's going to be okay. You know, my father lives in such and such a town now and I see him once in awhile, and you know, it's all right, and you know, my Daddy moved out too, and sometimes it's better. Just so wise and just so wonderful that they're able to do that and give each other that kind of support. And they're great. They just have to have the opportunity. I mean you just have to trust them enough to know that they're going to be able to do that and be able to be understanding.

And I can give them, you know, as much adult reassurance and what have you, but this kind of support that comes from other children that says it's okay is really the best that they can get.

REINHARDT: Isn't that child unusual? Isn't it much more often that children assume this is happening only to them and it's just too terrible to talk about?

GONZALES: That can happen except that one of the kinds of things we've done in this school for a long time is to make time in the curriculum for talking about things that make you happy, things that scare you, things that make you angry. You know. And how you deal with those. And just so the children know that it's okay to talk about those things and to give them a supportive kind of atmosphere where no-one's going to judge them per se, but just give them the chance to feel comfortable about saying what they need to talk about. And I think that's something we've tried to do here for a long time.

REINHARDT: Can you remember any other time when something like that came up?

GONZALES: In one case the child -- you know, I got back to the mother and she had in fact made a decision to get some counseling for him, because he really did need some additional

support. The children in turn continued to give him support in the classroom. He had many angry outbursts, many, many angry outbursts, and people knew that he was very angry because of what was happening at home. And so they gave him a certain amount of leeway, but they also put -- you know, they said, "That's enough." They knew when to say that was enough, and they said, you know --

REINHARDT: Little children? How do you see that happen?

GONZALES: Well, he wanted to be in control of like the block area, and they let him have that power, but when he overextended that power, they said enough, you know, and they came to the meeting and said, you know, we've got something we've got to talk about. And you know, he's really bossing too much. You know. And we don't want him to always be in charge. And we want to be able to take some turns now. And so we talked about it and we asked him how he felt about it and he saw their point of view, and you know, when you have five other little boys saying the same thing to you, you know, if it's just one adult he might try to say, well, you know, you just are trying to manipulate the situation because you're the adult and I'm the kid here, but if you've got four or five of your peers saying to you, "Hey, you're being too bossy," that has far more impact than my imposing, you know, saying to him, "You can't be in charge anymore," because he's getting the feedback from his friends, and that's far more effective.

MERROW: Mary Ann Gonzales, a first grade teacher at McCarthy Town School in Acton, Massachusetts.

REINHARDT: Sensitive teachers like Gonzales are not the only support single parents and their children find at McCarthy Town School. Principal Parker Damon holds evening office hours once a week. His teachers schedule conferences at night, for parents who work during the day. The school houses a self-supporting extended day program, supervised play before and after school for children of working parents. According to Principal Damon, schools must be responsive to the changing needs of families.

CHILD: I had a teacher in sixth grade, and she like -- I was very close to her, and sometimes, you know, every once in awhile she would just ask like, you know, "How are things going in your family," or, you know, "Are you okay," and everything. And that's good because, well, when my father died it was like she was asking me like, "Are you okay? Can you stay in class?" You know, she made sure that I was fine. You know, that if I couldn't handle it, just to leave and everything, because like she's only worrying about us, that we don't get hurt and we don't get like -- she was just like making sure that I'd be able to -- you know, stand it.

REINHARDT: You appreciated that when she did that?

CHILD: Yeah, because it was nicei to know that somebody out there cares. I mean a lot of people did care.

REINHARDT: But you didn't really know it, huh?

CHILD: Yeah. You can't really see it.

REINHARDT: If you'd like a transcript of our four part series on single parent homes, write to us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: Send us $4.00 for the transcript or $12.00 for the cassette recordings.

REINHARDT: And please tell us the call letters of your local NPR station.

MERROW: That's $4.00 for the transcript. $12.00 for the cassette recordings.

REINHARDT: Our address again, National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: Options in Education is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University . Funds for the series are provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: Options in Education is produced by John Merrow. Our Associate Producer is Mary Rouse. Assistant Producer is Rebecca Goldfield. Technical assistance by Loren Kelly. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

REINHARDT: This is NPR, National Public Radio.